

*The Feathered Pipe and Other Pipes*

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the two tribes had never been at war. In token of this, the "Lower Gros Ventres" gave the Gros Ventres a pipe to bind the two tribes together, the principal men of each tribe having met together in the middle ground between the parties. In late years some "Lower Gros Ventres" came on a visit to the Fort Belknap agency to inquire about the pipe and to take it back. But the pipe could not be found in the grave of Big Beaver with whom it had been buried. 778 648

According to Singer, her father, Bird Chief, had a pipe given by the Sioux or Assiniboiné. On a war expedition against the Piegan on which he had taken it, when the Piegan were pressing the Gros Ventres badly, he gave the pipe to his youngest brother who was captured with it, but let go. The pipe however was kept by the Piegan. This happened when Singer was a very small girl.

## RELATIVE DIGNITY AND POPULARITY OF THE SACRED PIPES

All our informants were fully agreed that the Flat and Feathered Pipes far outranked in sacredness, dignity, power and popularity any and all of the other Gros Ventre sacred pipes. 778 771●

There were, however, some differences of view among our informants as to the relative status of the Flat and Feathered Pipes themselves. These differences of view, traceable in part to informants' respective affiliations and preferences, were comparatively minor, and are largely reconcilable if we distinguish between what we may call "popular devotion" on the one hand and "liturgico-dogmatic" order of dignity on the other,—a distinction commonly discernible in religious life of other peoples of the world.

As regards "popular devotion," the two Pipes appear to have received about the same number of offerings, vowed and unwowed, from the people, and some Gros Ventres made it a practice rarely or never to cover or robe one of the two Pipes without at the same time covering the other. Some Gros Ventres, while holding both Pipes as superlatively sacred, thought the Feathered Pipe to be in certain respects more powerful, since it, unlike the Flat Pipe, had never been captured by the enemy and since, they held, those bands or groups who, when the tribe separated, followed the Flat

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778 Pipe met with more accidents and misfortune than those who  
 771 followed the Feathered Pipe.<sup>11</sup>

As regards "liturgico-dogmatic" order of dignity, the Flat Pipe appears to have had premier rank. It was the older of the two Pipes, having been given at the very time of "creation." On the march, most informants agreed that the Flat Pipe took the lead. The Flat Pipe alone had solemn seasonal rites proper, and these to obtain from the Supreme Being all things necessary for living long and happily, whereas the Feathered Pipe rites were mostly more particularistic in purpose, namely, to ask for rain and for protection against thunderstorms. Finally the Flat Pipe alone was brought to the sacred Sacrifice Dance ceremony to lend added solemnity thereto.

Regardless however of such differences in popularity and dignity and of certain differences of view among our informants, both Pipes were most deeply venerated by all the people, as gifts given in the last analysis by the Supreme Being himself, for the protection and well-being of all the Gros Ventres forever.

<sup>11</sup> In 1948 The Boy while discussing the relative merits of the two, told a long story of a dream given to his paternal grandfather, Crow Moccasin, keeper of the Feathered Pipe, through which he was able to save the people of his band from an attack by the enemy, although the rest of the Gros Ventres suffered great disaster. Impressed with the fact that the Feathered Pipe avoided capture, nevertheless The Boy still feels that the Flat Pipe is the greater, one argument being: "When the Flat Pipe was captured it found its way back to the Gros Ventres under its own power." For details of story on Loss and Recovery of the Flat Pipe, see No. 8 in Appendix. [R.F.]

## CHAPTER V

## THE SACRED DANCES

## GENERAL FEATURES

In the Gros Ventre public cult, as contrasted with more or less private cult concepts and observances, next after the sacred Pipe ceremonies, in order of rank and importance in the native view, were the Sacred Dances or Lodges,—the terms are used interchangeably, and while etymologically "Lodge" is correct, our informants preferred usually "Dance." 796\* 771 794

There were eight of these Sacred Dances: the Sacrifice Dance (commonly but incorrectly called the Sun Dance), the "Law Enforcers" or Old Man's Dance, the Drum Dance, the Kit-Fox Dance, the Dog Dance, the Crazy Dance, the Fly Dance, and the Old Women's Dance.<sup>1</sup> Of these eight, the Sacrifice Dance was more generally regarded as the "greatest," ranking first in order of importance and dignity, but somewhat outside of the others which have been mentioned in descending order. All eight were regarded as sacred rites, not merely social or good-time occasions, although such elements entered into them or were associated with them.

Ordinarily a person participated in or vowed during his life first the Fly Dance; only after this the Crazy, Kit-fox, Dog, Drum and Sacrifice Dances, and finally the Old Man's Dance. 796\*

Our chief informants on the Sacred Dances were The Boy, Turn Toes, Thick, Charles Buckman, Coming Daylight, and Singer. Lane Bull, from whom The Boy got most of his information on the Dances, had gone through all of them except the Drum Dance. He had even been selected as one of the two outstanding [115]

<sup>1</sup> Kroeber, 1908, pp. 227-268, gives an excellent account of these Dances, gotten at a time, nearly half a century ago, when tribal memory was fresher. Our data may help to fill out some of the picture.

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the one who introduced the Sacrifice Dance among the Gros Ventre people."

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Although in the origin story, it was the chief buffalo who promised to give aid to those who would perform the Sacrifice Dance, actually the chief buffalo was not prayed to during it, nor was the sun or any other being except the Supreme Being and Bha'a. Our chief informants have considerable knowledge of the Piegan (Blackfoot), Assiniboiné and Crow Sun Dances, and emphasized various important differences, as they understood them, between these dances and their own Sacrifice Dance. "These sacrifices [in the Sacrifice Dance]," Al Chandler remarked, "were made to God, not to the Sun. I have always wondered why people call our Sacrifice Dance the Sun Dance. Anything the Blackfeet cannot understand they call the Sun and think he must be something." According to The Boy and Thick, while the Blackfeet pray to the Sun and while the Assiniboiné in their Sun Dance pray and sing to the Thunder Bird (corresponding to the Gros Ventre Bha'a), the Gros Ventres in their own Sacrifice Dance prayed chiefly to Ixtcibani:hahat, secondarily, as will be explained later, to Bha'a, and with some incidental mention of or appeal to the Four Holy Beings and Those-who-follow-each-other (Sun and Moon) when praying with a pipe. Vows to carry out the Sacrifice Dance were made by the Gros Ventres only to the Supreme Being; the sacrifices of property, the prayer-"sacrifices" of self-torture and fasting, and the chief verbalized and gesture prayers during the rite were likewise directed to him. Our informants consistently and insistently emphasized that the Gros Ventre Sacrifice Dance was, in this sense, a predominantly theistic ceremony.

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While more generally the Sacrifice Dance was regarded as of lower ritual rank than the Flat and Feathered Pipe rites and as of higher rank than any of the other seven sacred Dances, there was some difference of view on the point among our informants. The Boy, who himself emphatically ranked Flat Pipe rite as far and away first in dignity of all Gros Ventre ceremonies, with the Feathered Pipe rite, Sacrifice Dance, and other dances following in this order of dignity, summed up the situation as follows:

"While the supreme religion of the Gros Ventres was the Flat

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Pipe, some individuals or whole bands would consider the Sacrifice Dance as greatest, would give first preference to the Sacrifice Dance as a means of worshiping the Supreme Being, or would think of the Sacrifice Dance and other Sacred Dances as supreme. Then there were other individuals and bands who would prefer to worship through the Pipe and the Sacrifice Dance, or through the Pipe and some other Sacred Lodge."

Among the reasons he and other informants gave for ranking the Flat Pipe rite above the Sacrifice Dance were the connection of the Pipe with the creation and history of the world and man, the donation of the Pipe by the Supreme Being, the rigidly determined and scrupulously observed ritual, the absence of all vulgar elements from the Pipe celebrations (as contrasted with some at least of the Sacred Dances). Reasons given for ranking the Sacrifice Dance above the other dances were that the Flat Pipe entered into active participation in the Sacrifice Dance and it alone entailed dire hardships in the way of self-torture, hunger and thirst.

The Sacrifice Dance was held only when some man had vowed it. A woman could not vow it, but, to judge from the story of First Singer, could vow to request a man to hold the Dance. A given man could vow to hold the dance as principal actor in it only once in his lifetime, but he could join the dance as an active associate participant a number of times. Once he had gone through it in fulfillment of a vow, he could serve as ceremonial grandfather on a later occasion to another who wanted to go through it.

The vow was made to the Supreme Being. In the story of First Singer, however, whether her vow was made to the Supreme Being or to the sun or to both is not clear.

If the vow were made in, say, midwinter, its fulfillment would be deferred until about June or when the spring vegetation was well advanced. In the meantime the vower might choose his grandfather and a crier, the formal public announcement of the vow might be made, and the preliminary four nights of singing might be gone through. Before the dance began this good-time singing, by men and women jointly, took place on four separate nights, not necessarily successive ones, but any nights during the preceding month or year. The fourth of these, however, had to

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## CHAPTER VI

## SUPERNATURAL POWERS

Most of the Gros Ventre rites and observances thus far dealt with in the present volume were intended to fulfill the wishes and needs of the whole tribe or of larger segments thereof and were actively participated in by all or many members of the tribe. In this sense these rites and observances constituted collectivistic public cult, and leaned toward cooperative altruism. The chief wishes they sought to satisfy were for continued long life for all, with abundance of food and other material necessities, and with freedom from epidemics, storms and tribal enemies, and for continued concord and solidarity among the tribal members. Ritual reliance was upon the petition, mostly to the major deities, the Supreme Being and Bha'a, through prayer expressed in word and in act. 771

Most of the rites and observances to be dealt with from here on were intended to fulfill the wishes and needs of specific individuals and were participated in by very small groups. In this sense these rites and observances constituted individualistic private cult, and leaned toward egoism, often a competitive egoism. The chief wishes they sought to satisfy were for knowledge of distant or future events, prestige through war prowess and wealth, cure of individual illness, and success in gambling or in sex affairs. Ritual reliance was upon the immediate help given in each case of appeal by an ancestral spirit or upon supernatural power imparted once for all by some non-ancestral superhuman being.

In the present section we shall take up first the personal ancestral helpers, and after that the personal supernatural powers. 787

Separate treatment of personal ancestral helpers and of personal powers seems advisable in view of certain rather fundamental differences between the two cultural patterns involved. The spiritual helper was appealed to for knowledge of distant or future events; other lesser beings for supernatural power in matters of 769